

Parliamentary Inquiry into PFAS Contamination

Robinson Family

[REDACTED]
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Submission:

a) The extent of the Contamination.

The extent of the contamination should be made public. Levels should be documented with public access not merely given to property owners that have had testing. When I asked about testing my property [REDACTED] told me in 2016 that it would be no point as I was obviously contaminated and they were only interested in how far it had spread.

b) The response by various departments.

The response to the contamination has been too slow or non-existent. We have had no visit from the Prime Minister even though he has been asked often to come to this area. The PFAS task force under Senator McGrath visited but only a select few were invited to speak with him. The Department of Health report was limited to information that was outdated. An example was using a Draft Report by Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) from 2015 when an interim report by (ATSDR) from October 2017 was readily available. The Department of Defence is the polluter and knew that the contamination had left the base back in 2012 but keep it from the property owners until September 2015. We only found out through the newspaper after the EPA made it known. Defence Williamtown have made no attempt to stop the contamination leaving the RAAF Base and have in fact exacerbated the spread with Infrastructure that has and is still taking place on a scale of huge proportions. The amount budgeted for in 2015 for the Stage 2 works alone was \$270million and this was just for accommodation/car parking/and aircraft buildings.

Communication and Co-ordination.

This community has had several meetings and drop-in sessions over that past almost 3 years. These meetings have been almost a complete waste of our time. The times of the meetings are when many have work commitments or have the inability to travel. A prime example of this was of a meeting held at Salamander which is approx 30 klms from Williamtown and with a poor transport system.

c) The adequacy of Health Advice and Testing

The Human Health Risk Assessment advises those in the contamination area to not drink ground water, avoid using ground water for bathing, showering, swimming, don't eat eggs or vegetables grown in the area and don't eat livestock from the area. Then we get the spin that this is only precautionary advice as there is no consistent evidence of health effects.

Information of TDI (tolerable daily intake) given to us makes no sense when we already have high levels of these chemicals in our bloods. Then to say that it is ok to sell livestock and produce to be consumed by persons out of the contamination area is a farce when we don't know where the livestock and produce has come from when we purchase from supermarkets etc.

This is a man made chemical that should not be in our bodies to begin with. The Australian National University has been employed to do a health study but their advice is that it will not be completed until 2020. Blood testing has been limited to one test that will only show current levels and without further testing we will be unable to tell if our levels in our blood is lessening or increasing.

Mental health is not being adequately addressed. Stress levels are high when we can't sell our properties as banks will not lend in this area and therefore we can't leave. There is fear that our current health problems and health problems in the future are caused by these chemicals.

f) Remediation works at the base.

This term of reference is absolutely insulting. It should be remediation works inclusive of the properties contaminated by these chemicals from the base. Absolutely no remediation to my knowledge has taken place outside the base. A filtration system was used on the base for Lake Cochran and the filtered water was discharged into Dawson's Drain that flows through Williamtown, Fullerton Cove and then into the Hunter River. The system does not remove all of the PFAS. Testing of properties after the discharge showed higher levels of PFAS in ground water than previous testing.

g) Consideration given to understanding and addressing financial impact.

I do not believe that there has been any consideration of the financial impact.

Not only have we lost our properties value we now have to buy all our vegetables and eggs. The cost of medical bills and medication that we now take that could be associated to the PFAS in our bodies has not been taken into account.

Our lives have been turned upside down. We question whether our health problems now and in the future will be the result of these chemicals. We have lost faith and trust that the right thing will be done for those affected. We believe that everything associated with the contamination of our land and health is being manipulated to down play the seriousness of the effect to us not only financially but also to our health past, present and future. We are also critical of the time taken to even have reports made available to us. Blood results have taken months to get back. We also find it unacceptable that we are being used as lab rats to see what health issues we may have.

On June 20th 2018 the US Federal Agency for Toxic Substances released the latest toxicological report. The proposed ATSDR "minimum risks levels" translates to roughly 7ppt for PFOS, 11ppt for PFOA, 70ppt PFHxS and 10.5ppt for PFNA. It should be noted that PFHxS is closely related with AFFF and is already in our bloods but has not been included in any reports in Australia. This report notes that available epidemiological studies suggest associations between PFAS exposure and several health effects.

- Pregnancy induced hypertension / pre-eclampsia (PFOA, PFOS)
- Liver damage (PFOA, PFOS, PFHxS)
- Increases in total and LDL cholesterol (PFOA,PFOS, PFNA, PFDeA)
- Increased risk of thyroid diseases (PFOA, PFOS)
- Decreased antibody response to vaccines (PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, PFDeA)
- Increased risk of asthma diagnosis (PFOA)
- Small increases in birth weight (PFOA, PFOS)
- Increases in testicular cancer and kidney cancer in people exposed to high levels of (PFOA, PFOS)

With regard to statements made by all Government Departments that continually state that there is no consistent evidence of health effects from these chemicals it would appear that Australia is not keeping up with the latest overseas findings.

It should also be noted that the current Fire Fighting Foam that is now being used still contains PFAS even if it is in reduced amounts to AFFF. It is still the same group of chemicals that will build up in humans and the environment.

In regard to the first inquiry into PFAS it is unbelievable that the recommendations were not acted upon.

Yours faithfully,

Jenny Robinson.